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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses dropout prevention and "Forward in the Fifth," an innovative program for school development in the Fifth Congressional District of southern Kentucky. The program focused on formation of a support group that could give school systems sustained financial and educational support from community and business leaders. Local groups formed to attack the dropout problem of the Fifth District, which was rated in 1980 as the lowest in educational achievement of any in the country. Small-grant programs encouraged teachers to try new ways of motivating students. Administrators and teachers met to exchange ideas. Colleges and universities formed a consortium to raise the number of college-goers among high school graduates. Substantial grant money was acquired. "Forward in the Fifth" was born at a 1986 conference among district leaders, who linked development of economic opportunities and improved education. Conference participants carried the program throughout southern Kentucky communities. The document includes a timeline of events that marked the progress of the "Forward in the Fifth" program. A study of Fifth District educational attitudes made by the Mountain Association for Community and Economic Development (MAECD) is discussed. MAECD reported: the need to understand that Fifth District students are as smart as anyone else, even though educational quality lags; that people there care about education; and that people understand educational improvement is a task for everyone, not just educators and professionals. MAECD also learned that political patronage with its attendant low standards, perceived by many as one of the greatest obstacles to improving education. (TES)

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AN INNOVATION EDUCATION PROGRAM

FORWARD IN THE FIFTH

A SPEECH PRESENTED TO THE

CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION IN APPALACHIA

BY

WOODY J. BARWICK

OCTOBER 26, 1987

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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An Innovative Education Program

I'm Woody J. Barwick, Superintendent of Pulaski County representing the Executive Committee of Forward in the Fifth - JoAnne James, Chairman. My topic for today's "Conference on Education in Appalachia" concerns dropout prevention and innovative programs for school improvement.

Crucial issues in improving education in Kentucky's Fifth Congressional District.

In March of 1986, I was priviledged to meet with Dr. John White, E. R. Purdon, Earl Wallace and Elbert Hudson regarding school improvement programs for the Fifth Congressional District of Kentucky. I believe Forward in the Fifth was born on that day at Shakertown.

E. R. Purdon is quoted in his presentation as follows: "This presentation is a summary of views regarding the public school dropout issue in the Fifth Congressional District. It presents the practitioners' assessment of the issue, and I am indebted to the local school superintendents who contributed their knowledge and opinions.

Even though the dropout issue is pronounced and recognized as a detrimental force in the development of the area, one must ask if local school leaders recognize these conditions and, if so, what action they are taking to appropriately address the problem?

We conclude our summary with the future then requires a support group, foundation perhaps, that could focus on this issue and give school systems and communities the kind of

structure needed to make meaningful progress. The effort must be a sustained one. Too many times, interest is shown in a problem, only to evaporate as other issues appear. School superintendents are all too aware of this kind of "here today and gone tomorrow" approach to dealing with educational issues. If we want real change, we must build sustained financial and educational support from community and business leaders. Only then can real progress take place. "Between the thought and the reality, there falls the shadow." Forward in the Fifth was born.

A wave of enthusiasm for education has sprung to the forefront in southern Kentucky, and promises to stir the mind and arouse the ambition of the 110,000 children of the District. In a region found by the 1980 Census to have the lowest educational achievement level of any of the nation's 435 Congressional Districts, the hope for educational improvement and reform is burning brighter than ever before.

Business and civic leaders have incorporated Forward in the Fifth as a nonprofit movement to bring all resources of the District to bear directly on a better educational environment for these 110,000 young minds- Local Forward in the Fifth groups are forming in every one of the District's twenty-seven counties - Chambers of Commerce are attacking the dropout problem in their communities - School districts are raising the daily attendance rate of their students - Programs of small grants encourage teachers to try new ways of motivating and teaching their students - Administrators

and teachers from thirty-eight school districts are meeting together to exchange ideas - The colleges and universities that serve the District have formed a consortium to work together to raise the college-going rate among the District's high school graduates and adults - The Kentucky Council on Higher Education and the Kentucky Department of Education have given the District $60,000 to develop new and better ways to teach mathematics and science to the District's school children - The Ford Foundation has awarded a $150,000 grant to bolster this unprecedented educational crusade. And dozens of other initiatives arise every day for this one purpose: to better educate this generation of students of Kentucky's Fifth Congressional District.

Where and when did this movement begin? The spark was struck in the minds and hearts of some of the leaders of the Fifth District on May 22 and 23, 1986, in a restored Shaker wash house, now a conference building at Kentucky's historic Shakertown at Pleasant Hill. There the District's leaders came together to hear a special "Case Study of the Fifth District" prepared by the world-renowned Battelle Institute of Columbus, Ohio and the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED), a leading think tank and action group for Appalachian problems.

There are pivotal points in the history of a nation, or a state, or even a Congressional district, when something happens that forever changes the future, for good or ill. Such a point for Kentucky's Fifth Congressional District -

one of the most economically depressed districts in America - came on May 22 and 23, 1986. A conference in the renowned Shakertown Roundtable series brought together experts, educators, state leaders, and much of the civic and business leadership of the Fifth Congressional District to consider the region's education system and economy and to develop strategies to move its people forward toward prosperity.

The conference linked development of economic opportunities with improved education and training. On the first day, the economic development specialists at the Battelle Institute laid out their analysis of what types of industry and jobs were well suited to the area, and suggested steps to build those opportunities.

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On the second day, the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development reported their findings that people in the District understood the value of education and were ready to work for better schools and wider opportunities. Successful experiences in improving educational attainment were described by a rural high school teacher, a rural textile company president, an urban civic leader, and leadership from within the District and around the state. After these two days talking together in a restored Shaker wash house, some 80 men and women rose to take actions that were unprededented in this state, and

perhaps the nation.

It was not only what happened at the conference that is so historic and filled with import, but what has been happening ever since. At the close of the conference the Fifth District's Congressman, Harold Rogers, told the 80 participants: "I hope that we will have more than another study that will gather dust on the shelves, along with the ten thousand other studies of this district and others." In the months that followed, his hope was realized. People who care about the Fifth District are moving forward:

June 1986: Eliot Wigginton, a teacher well-known throughout the country for his remarkable success in inspiring poor, rural students and a presenter at the conference, gives a one-day workshop for teachers from the Fifth District. On another day, a Fifth District school superintendent brings a busload of teachers and administrators to hear Mr. Wigginton. These teachers represented Pulaski County Schools.

July 1986: Impressed bythe energy and commitment conveyed at the conference, the Appalachian Regional Commission provides $50,000 to staff a District-wide program dedicated to improving education, as called for during the conference.

August 1986: A Somerset, Kentucky businessman arranges for John Dashler, a conference presenter, nationally known for his attack on the dropout problem in Dalton, Georgia, to speak with Pulaski County business leaders about his work.

The local chamber of commerce establishes a program in Pulaski County modeled on Dashler's.

August 1986: Al Smith, vice chairman of the Shakertown Roundtable and one of the instigators of the conference, writes and distributes to newspapers throughout the District, a series of fifteen articles on the issues raised at the conference.

September 1986: Thirty conference participants form a permanent organization to strengthen the thirty-eight school systems throughout the Fifth District.

October 1986: All thrity-eight Fifth District school superintendents are invited to a meeting to plan for the new organization.

October 20, 1986: Forward in the Fifth is launched. Kentucky Governor, Martha Layne Collins, Congressman Harold Rogers, and co-chair of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), Winifred Pizzano, address the capacity crowd gathered to launch the effort.

A board of directors of forty-one civic and education leaders and activists and an advisory board of twenty-seven others commit themselves to building the new organization. The group set its agenda:

-develop affiliate groups in every county;
-improve attendance at all schools;
-reduce the dropout rate;
-improve science and math instruction;
-raise the expectations of students, parents, teachers, and communities;
-increase the percentage of high school graduates going on to college.

November 1986: Forward in the Fifth issues its first

newsletter.

December 1986: Forward in the Fifth sponsors a Showcase Conference at Barbourville's Union College, with over 200 educators, school administrators, and business leaders sharing in presentations and workshops featuring successful improvements initiatives in the Fifth District. David Bergholz, president of the Public Education Fund and also a Shakertown Roundtable presenter, gives the keynote address. Executive committee member Rebecca Davidson from Clay County brings people to their feet with a stirring talk about how to reach students.

December 1986: Forward in the Fifth initiates a District-wide program to improve school attendance, including some $8,000 in cash awards.

January 1987: Forward in the Fifth issues its second newsletter.

February 1987: Forward in the Fifth begins organizing local affiliates in all parts of the District.

February 1987: Forward in the Fifth develops policy proposals that emphasize dropout prevention programs for younger children.

February 1987: Kentucky Council on Higher Education awards a $60,000 Title II grant to fund a Forward in the Fifth program to improve science and math instruction.

January 1987: A consortium of colleges and universities that serve the Fifth District is formed to train and deploy volunteers throughout the District who will counsel students

and parents about college-going opportunities.

March 1987: Proposals are presented to the Ford Foundation, the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, the Hazen Foundation, and the Appalachian Regional Commission, for both educational and economic advancement programs in the Fifth District.

February 1987: Kentucky Council on Higher Education awards a $60,000 Title II grant to fund a Forward in the Fifth program to improve science and math instruction.

March 1987: The Ford Foundation grants to Forward in the Fifth $150,000 to be used over the next two years, and other foundations are considering requests.

March 1987: Meetings to form local affiliates are held in twelve communities, and over 1,250 individuals are now involved in Forward in the Fifth.

WHAT DO PEOPLE IN THE FIFTH DISTRICT THINK ABOUT EDUCATION?
(Presented by Dr. Cynthia Duncan, Director of Research, MACED)

We found three overriding themes when we talked with people about education in the Fifth District:

First, we need to understand that even though educational quality lags, the students are as smart as those anywhere else.

Second, the people of the District do care about education, and diverse groups actually have much common ground in their concern and ideas for reform.

Finally, the people of the District agree that improvement of education is a task for all the people, not just educators and professionals.

MACED's study found that parents and students in the District value education, and many parents make great sacrifices to see that their children get a good education. But the children face greater obstacles than those in more prosperous regions. Many come from poor families, and their parents are often poorly educated themselves. The problem is compounded because the region has a tax base of only $64,000 per pupil, compared with $106,000 in the Fourth District, and $89,000 for Kentucky.

Many people told the interviewers that the expectations within the schools were too low. Parents complained that the schools were too easy, while teachers said that many parents don't motivate their children well. Some of those interviewed said that students are sometimes prejudged at school by their appearance and family background, and are not encouraged to continue their education, even when they are good students.

Politics was mentioned by many as the greatest obstacle to improving education within the District. In many poor, rural counties, schools provide the majority of available jobs, and patronage rather than merit determines who gets hired. The study found that the most highly-politicized school districts have the highest dropout rates and poorest achievement levels. All the schools that were politicized provided lower quality education.

Some personal notes regarding success. The Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution to ask

employers to require all employees below 21 years of age to be (a) a high school graduate (b) a GED recipient or (c) verification that one is working to further their education.

The Pulaski County Board of Education dropouts annually decreased from 195 in 1984 to 94 in 1987, a decrease of 101 which may represent five (5) minimum foundation units and result in $100,000 more revenue.